THE ORGANIZATION
AND
ADMINISTRATION
OF THE
LOCAL CHURCH

By

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OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

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NOTE TO THE READER

This little book has been prepared with the prayer and desire that it would be helpful to the ministry of the local church. To receive the maximum benefit from this book it is suggested that you read it through carefully, two or three times. Look up the Scripture passages and hopefully you will see that what it says is based on Scripture.

Perhaps you can also give or loan this book, to others so that they can consider these matters. It is hoped that this summary of church operations will be widely circulated through churches and schools in many places. It is our intention that as many copies as possible can be furnished to those who request them.

May the Lord use this book in your ministry for the blessing of God's people and the building and strengthening of local churches.

THE BASIS FOR WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE

CHURCH

How do we know what we should believe about the church? To many people this question is very confusing. There are so many ideas about what a church is, how it should be organized, what the officers are and what they should do, who should control the church and who should belong to the church. Where have all of these ideas come from?

There are many sources for the answers that people give. Sadly, many ideas have come from traditions that have developed over the centuries. Many traditions have come from the Roman Catholic church. Other traditions have come from popular leaders. Many ideas have arisen because people did not study the Bible carefully, or ignored what it said. Often churches operate a certain way just because someone told them to do it that way, but they have never understood why.

Really, all of our ideas about what a church is, or how it should operate should come from, or be consistent with the Bible, the Word of God. If we hold a tradition that is contrary to Scripture, we should abandon that tradition, no matter where it came from, or how long we have followed it, nor what the consequences may be. If we have ideas or do things that are not in agreement with Scripture, then we should change what we think and what we do.

Liberals, who do not really believe the Bible, feel that they can develop any system of church government or conduct that they wish. But Bible believing Baptists have always held the position that the Word of God is our only authority for faith and practice. The Bible is the book that tells us what to believe and what to do. The Bible is our authority because we know it is the only infallible and divinely inspired Word of God. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” (II Timothy 3:16) “Holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” (II Peter 1:21) Not only was the Bible inspired by God and written by holy men of God, it has been accurately preserved for us down through the centuries. “For ever, O LORD, thy Word is settled in heaven.” (Psalm 119:89) “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Word shall not pass away.” (Luke 21:33) Therefore, it is our privilege and our sacred obligation to follow the Word of

God in the way that our churches are organized and operated. Just as Moses was admonished of God that when he built the tabernacle he should make "all things according to the pattern showed thee in the mount," (Hebrews 8:5) so we should follow the pattern in the New Testament as we build our churches.

The fact is, even many Baptist churches are not operating according to the Biblical pattern. Often their leaders believe the Bible and love the Lord, but because of old traditions, lack of training, and false ideas, they fail to follow the pattern and teachings of Scripture. This results in much confusion, inefficiency, and controversy in many local churches. Instead of effectively reaching others with the gospel of salvation, they often spend much time with strife and divisions.

The purpose of this book is, by God's grace, to give a simple and clear guide for the conduct of local churches that is in agreement with scriptural principles. As a pastor for over 40 years, I clearly see the necessity and the value of following the Scriptural pattern. It is my prayer that the contents of these pages will be looked at carefully, compared with Scripture, and put into practice for the glory of God and the blessing and progress of the local church.

The Author,
Dr. James R. Hines

Suppose that a man desires to have a fine farm. In his mind he can see green rice fields, a row of banana trees, a fine house and even some animals. That is the big goal that he wants to achieve. Now to achieve this, he must have many smaller plans. There must be a plan for purchasing the land and preparing and plowing it. There must be a plan for what crops to plant and when to plant them. Once things are planted, he must have a plan for watering his crops and fields properly. Then he must decide how he is going to harvest and store his crops, and how he is going to sell them. Many small plans must follow one after another to achieve the big plan for a beautiful and profitable farm.

This is similar to God's program for the ages. The big picture in God's mind is that wonderful day when every knee will bow before Him, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God. Now, to bring that about, God must have many smaller plans which will eventually lead to that glorious day. In theological terms, these smaller plans are called "dispensations". The word "dispensation" means, "the rules of the household". That is, "this is the way the household will be run at this time."

Over the ages, God has run His household in different ways. The first dispensation is often called, "The age of Innocence." That was when Adam and Eve were placed in the garden of Eden. It was a very simple arrangement. They just had to do two things. They had to take care of the garden, and they were told they could not eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Those were the "rules of God's household" at that time. After this there were other dispensations and then there was the dispensation that began in the days of Moses. It is usually called "the dispensation of law." God gave Moses 10 commandments and many other laws to give to the people to follow. He also gave them strict regulations about what the sacrifices should be and how they should be offered to God. There were laws about what they should wear, what they could eat and many other things. The dispensation of the law was followed by the dispensation of the church, sometimes also called the dispensation of grace. In the New Testament books of Acts and the Epistles, God outlined his plan and program for the local church. This is the dispensation in which we now live.

Now some things have been common in all dispensations. In all dispensations people were to trust in God and obey Him. In all dispensations murder, lying and other sins are wrong. In all dispensations people were saved and justified by faith in the perfect sacrifice of Christ. Some have criticized dispensationalists for believing in different ways of salvation, but this is not true. People have always been saved by faith alone. "For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness....Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed unto him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." (Romans 4:3, 22-23) People from Old Testament days as well as today, are saved by faith in Christ

So even though some things are similar in all dispensations, each dispensation also has distinctives that do not apply to other dispensations. None of us have to be concerned about eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That dispensation has passed. We don't offer animal sacrifices today, nor do we have to go to the tabernacle or temple three times a year to worship. We are no longer under that dispensation

We are now in a different dispensation, the dispensation of the church. So, in this dispensation (church) how should churches operate? What should the church officers be? What are the duties of deacons? Who should be baptized? How do we deal with a member that falls into sin?

Much confusion and false doctrine has arisen in Christianity because people take the distinctives of one dispensation and apply them to another one. This is particularly true of those who confuse God's dealings with Israel in the Old Testament with the principles of the church in the New Testament. One of the results of this is what is known as "Reformation Theology" or "Covenant Theology." These people confuse and mingle God's program for Israel with God's program for the church. They take God's promises to Israel and transfer them to the church. They turn Old Testament Jewish circumcision into Christian baptism and use this to justify baptizing infants.

These incorrect ideas bring complete confusion to the doctrine of the church in the New Testament. God's Word is clear. There is a distinction which must be

maintained between the old dispensation of the Law and the new dispensation of the church. "In that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." (Hebrews 8:13) "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law." (Hebrews 7:12)

It is important to understand these differences when we consider how churches should operate and conduct their business. Since the church was a "mystery" during Old Testament times, we should not expect to learn anything about the church from Old Testament Scriptures. (Ephesians 3:1-6, 3:32, Colossians1:24-27) The principles that we use for determining how churches should function must come from the New Testament, not from the Old Testament. The Old Testament contains principles and illustrations that are useful in the life of a church, but the specific matters that deal with the functioning of a church must come from the New Testament examples of church conduct and from the specific instructions written to churches. Everything that we do in our churches should be based on, or consistent with New Testament church principles.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

If a group of Christians meets together, even regularly, that does not necessarily mean that the group is a church. Something may be a religious organization and not be a church. We have denominations, such as the Lutheran or Pentecostal denomination, but a denomination is not a church. Sometimes people ask, "What does the Baptist Church believe?," referring to the Baptist denomination. They should ask, "What do Baptist churches believe?" because a denomination is not a church. Neither is a building a "church." Often we talk about "building a church", when we really mean building a place for the church to meet.

The word "church" in the New Testament means, "a called out assembly," that is, a group of people that have been called together for a specific purpose. As the word is used in the New Testament, a church is "an organized group of baptized believers who regularly assemble for worship, instruction, fellowship, service and

the observance of the ordinances."

Although the word "church" is occasionally used in the New Testament in the collective sense, that is, referring to the body of all believers (Colossians 1:18, 24) the vast majority of uses of the word "church" refers specifically to a local body of believers. The New Testament refers to "the church at Jerusalem" and "the churches of Galatia". Paul wrote letters to local churches in Philippi, Colossae, Ephesus, Corinth etc. In Revelation chapters 2-3 Jesus sent letters to seven specific churches in seven cities in Asia Minor. This is the "church dispensation" and God has chosen the local church to be his agency to spread the Word, just as Israel was His agency for spreading His truth in Old Testament times.

To be a fully organized and functioning church following the New Testament pattern, every local body of believers needs to have the following:

1. A list of the names of those who are members of the church
2. A Pastor (or several pastors for a larger church)
3. Deacons
4. A constitution describing the doctrines, standards of conduct and practices of the church
5. Regular meetings for worship and for conducting the business of the church.

Each one of these matters will be discussed in detail further on. Without these things a church cannot be following the New Testament pattern, nor can it be functioning like a New Testament church should. It is understood that many churches may not have been instructed in these basic principles. That is why this book is written- to provide the help and instruction that is needed so churches can operate Scripturally and effectively.

THE LOCAL CHURCH IS THE MAIN THING

The local church is the center of God's program for this dispensation. The immediate result of the day of Pentecost was the local church in Jerusalem. Paul's ministry was totally occupied with starting and strengthening local churches. Jesus said that matters of discipline were to be ultimately dealt with by the church. Twelve of the New Testament epistles were written to local churches, or to pastors of local churches. The first

missionaries were sent out by a local church. The book of Revelation begins with letters to seven local churches. The only organizations built or mentioned in the New Testament were local churches. It is plain that God intended that His work in this age was to be carried on by local churches. Any other Christian organization, whether missions society, Bible College, orphanage, publishing house, camp or fellowship should be under the control and direction of a local church or group of churches. Organizations that operate independently of local churches usually have no proper oversight, accountability or doctrinal controls for their conduct. This often results in inefficiency, financial mishandling, uncertain doctrine and many other problems. In all of our efforts for the Lord, we should keep the local church at the center of our thinking as they did in the New Testament.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Every church should maintain an up to date list of all those who are members of that church. It is plain that, even though it was not mentioned by name, they did have a membership list in the New Testament churches. In Acts 2:41, it tells about the three thousand people who were added to the church in Jerusalem. They could not have been "added" to the church unless there was a group of church members to which they could be added. In I Corinthians 5:13 Paul tells the church that they should "put away" a wicked person from among themselves. This would be impossible to do unless there was a recognized list of those who were members of the church. In verse 12 he tells the Corinthian church that they need not judge "them that are without," but were responsible to judge "them that are within". It could not be said that some are outside of the church and some are inside unless there was a church membership list that identified who the members of the congregation were. In I Corinthians 12:27 Paul reminds the church in Corinth that they are the body of Christ and "members" in particular. He repeatedly compares the "members" of the church to the members of the body. In II Corinthians 2:6, Paul refers to the discipline of a sinning member which was "Inflicted by many", a clear reference to official action of the church majority. A church could not exercise any discipline over its members if it was not clear who the

members were. A church could not properly conduct business unless people knew who the members were who were entitled to vote on church decisions. It is both Scripturally and logically necessary for every church to maintain an up to date list of the membership of the church.

Now, a good question is, “Who should be a member of the local church?” Should a church receive into it’s membership anyone who wants to join the church? Can small children be members of a church? Does a person have to be baptized in order to join a church? It is clear from the New Testament that there are three qualifications for a person to be allowed to become a member of a New Testament Baptist church.

The first requirement for church membership is that a person must be genuinely converted (born again) and have a clear testimony of salvation. Bible believing Baptists have always insisted on a regenerated church membership. This is what the New Testament expects. When Paul wrote to the different congregations, he referred to them as “saints”. This label could only be applied to saved people. In Acts 2:41, it was those who received Peter’s word, telling them about Christ who would save them, that were “added” to the church in Jerusalem. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul wrote “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints”. To the Philippians he wrote, “To all the saints which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”. He tells the church at Ephesus that God’s goal for the church is that is should be “a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” No church that wants to follow that pattern can allow unsaved members. It is obvious that Paul assumed that the members of the churches were genuinely regenerated individuals. Many liberal churches have many members who do not have any idea of what salvation means. A church that has unsaved members has seriously departed from the New Testament standard and should take definite steps to graciously but firmly remove any unsaved people from its membership.

The second requirement for membership in a biblical Baptist church is baptism. Baptism is only valid if it is the immersion in water of a person who has previously been born again and can give a credible

testimony of his salvation. In the book of Acts, Paul, Cornelius, the Ethiopian eunuch, the Philippian jailer, Lydia, and the three thousand who were saved on the day of Pentecost were all baptized after they were converted. According to Romans 6, baptism is a testimony, not only of our faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, but also a testimony of our spiritual death to the old life before we were saved, and the beginning of a new life as genuine followers of Christ. Baptism cannot be a testimony of salvation if a person has not been saved. The Scriptural pattern is Acts 2:41 is: first, receiving the Word (salvation), then baptism, then being added to the church membership. It is absolutely essential that this pattern should still be followed.

The third requirement for membership in a biblical church is consistent Christian living. People who are not willing or able to conduct their lives as Christians should not be included in the membership of the church. Of course no Christian is perfect, and all have faults. We must understand that a new Christian is a spiritual baby and will have to learn and grow before he can demonstrate spiritual maturity. But when a person's conduct is obviously contrary to Godly principles it should be made clear to the unsaved community in the area, that the Christians do not approve of that kind of conduct. Jesus said that a person who sinned against another and refused to correct his error should be treated by the church like a heathen and a publican. (Matthew 18:15-17) He commanded the Corinthian church, "if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one, no, not to eat (the Lord's Supper). Therefore, put away from among yourselves, that wicked person." (I Corinthians 5: 11,13) To the Thessalonians he wrote, "withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly." (II Thessalonians 3:6) It is plain that people who had open, and persistent outward sin in their lives, were not to be allowed to continue as members of the New Testament churches. This also would mean that such people should not be received into the membership of a church. If they had lived sinful lives, were then saved, and have now begun to live right, they should be received. But if they claim to be saved but are still continuing in their sinful ways, they should not be received as members. This would suggest that it may be

wise not to baptize people until they have demonstrated by their life that they have been genuinely converted. Church members who live in obvious sin cause unsaved people to stumble, hinder the testimony of the church and diminish the blessings of God.

Those who want to become members of a church must be accepted by the vote of the current members of the church. It is best if there is some kind of process so that prospective members are first evaluated by someone, either the pastor or deacons, to hear their testimony and discuss with them the qualifications for church membership. Then they could be either recommended to the church for membership or encouraged to do whatever might be necessary for them to qualify for a recommendation to the church. It is good to have the prospective members give their testimony of salvation to the church and allow for any questions or discussion before their membership is voted on. Usually such discussion and the vote would be taken without the prospective member being present in the room.

In summary, we believe it is both scriptural and necessary, for every local church to have an accurate listing of those who are members of the church, and that these members should be only those who have been genuinely converted, baptized as believers by immersion, and are living lives that are consistent with Christian standards. Those who do not meet these requirements should not be received as church members, or should be removed from the church membership if they are already members.

THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH

According to the New Testament, the pastor is the leader of the church. He should be the main preacher and teacher, the spiritual example, the chairman of business meetings and the overseer of all church activities. No church can function very well for very long without the leadership of a good and godly pastor. Larger churches may want to have assistant pastors to help the pastor in his responsibilities, but there must be one main pastor who directs his assistants.

Though it is common for many churches to be confused on this issue, it must be understood that the only scriptural office in the church besides that of

deacon, is the office of pastor. Some confusion exists because there are three terms in the New Testament used to describe the office of the pastor. In addition to the word "pastor," we also find in the New Testament the terms "elder" and "bishop." These words do not suggest three different officers in the church, but are three different terms or titles describing the one office of pastor. The word "bishop" means "overseer." The word "elder" was simply a title of respect. The word "pastor" is a word that means "shepherd," and is the word that best describes his overall position. We can see that these words all refer to the same position because they are used interchangeably in the New Testament. In Acts 20:17 it says that Paul called the "elders" of the church in Ephesus to come and have a meeting with him. As he talked to them, he said in verse 28 that God had made them "bishops" to "pastor" the church. He was referring to the same people, calling them "elders" and "bishops" and "pastors." Obviously, all three titles referred to the same group of people. Because the church in Ephesus was very large, they had a number of pastors, but they did not have three different offices. We find the same pattern in I Peter 5, where Peter speaks to the "elders" in verse one, and in verse two tells them to "pastor" the church and be the "bishops" (overseers) of it. When Paul wrote to the church of the Philippians, he mentions saints (believers), elders and deacons. Why would he not mention the pastors? Because the "elders" were the pastors. When Paul outlines the qualifications for church officers in I Timothy 3, he only mentions "bishops" and "deacons". Why does he not mention pastors? Because the bishops were the pastors. When Paul writes to Titus, he tells him to ordain "elders" in every city, and then lists the qualifications for "bishops" (Titus 1:5,7). He does not mention pastors, because they all understood that pastors, elders and bishops were all just different titles for the same position. This is just like the leader of a country could be called the "president", the chief executive" or the "commander in chief," but all three titles would be referring to the same position. Because churches have often neglected this plain truth, they have developed all sorts of different church offices which lead to organizational hierarchy, conflicts of authority, confusing leadership, misunderstandings and dissension. New Testament churches were operated in a very simple

manner, with a pastor to lead, deacons to help, and the other people to carry on the ministry. Many churches need to reorganize their operations and get back to the simple local church government found in the New Testament.

The qualifications for the office of pastor are clearly given in I Timothy 3:1-6. He should be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, hospitable, able and ready to teach, not given to wine or fighting, not greedy or covetous, but managing his household well, and having obedient children. Basically, the same qualifications are mentioned in Titus 1:6-10. Blameless does not mean sinless, for all men have their faults and failings. It does mean that he should have a reputation as a good man. When it says "the husband of one wife" it does not seem to mean that he has to be married, (although it is best if he is) but that he should have only one wife (not a divorced and remarried man). Some would suggest that a man should not be a pastor unless he is married. But if that is the case, then a man could not be a deacon either, unless he is married, for Paul gives the same qualifications for a deacon. (I Timothy 3:12) It is also recognized that Paul did not have a wife either. The term "blameless" would include the idea that he should not be a divorced man, because that would give him a poor reputation in the eyes of others. In choosing a pastor, a church should carefully examine a candidate for this position. He will not be a perfect man, but he should meet these basic scriptural qualifications.

The qualifications for the office of pastor do not allow a woman to fill this position. Many women are very capable of doing many things, but they cannot meet the scriptural qualifications for the office of pastor. They should not be "ruling their household" and cannot be "the husband of one wife." Paul also makes it very clear that the woman is to learn in silence and not teach or usurp authority over the man. (I Timothy 2:11-14) A woman who preaches or serves as pastor of a church is exercising authority over the men in the congregation, which is unscriptural.

The responsibilities of the pastor are best summarized in the word "pastor" which is the word for "shepherd". A shepherd's duties are to lead, feed and protect the flock. These are the very things mentioned in Acts 20:28 and I Peter 5:1-3. A pastor is to lead his

congregation, with God's help knowing where they should go and leading them in that direction. By his regular teaching and preaching he should be feeding them with solid spiritual food so that they can be spiritually growing and healthy. He must guard them against false doctrine and bad conduct by warning and exhorting them from the Word of God. Peter also mentions that he must be an example to the flock. These are all very important responsibilities which every pastor should take very seriously and seek to fulfill with God's help.

THE DEACONS OF THE CHURCH

Every church and pastor needs a group of good and godly deacons to serve in this office. Paul says that those who serve well as deacons gain recognition and reward for their faithfulness. (I Timothy 3:13) However, many churches have had many difficulties and have had their ministry greatly hindered by deacons who have not understood what their proper position was and believed that they were supposed to be the leaders and directors of the church. Certainly this is not what the Scriptures teach.

The word "deacon" means literally, "servant." A deacon is not someone who is supposed to run the church and tell the pastor what to do. He is supposed to be the servant of the church by helping the pastor in any way that his help is needed. In Acts 6 we have a record of the election of the first deacons. There was a problem in the church. The Greek widows were not being properly taken care of. The apostles, who were the original pastors of the church in Jerusalem, did not have time to see that the widows were fed. They needed help, so they suggested to the church that some men be chosen to help with this problem. The church chose seven men who the pastors installed and assigned to care for this responsibility. As other churches were established, they also chose men to serve as deacons, helping the pastor by taking care of some of the more mundane business of the church.

It is the business of the deacons to help the pastor in those areas where he needs help. They should normally handle the money of the church, look after the church building and the preparations for the church service, assist with the Lord's Supper, help with the

business affairs of the church and help in any other areas where the pastor needs their help. They can also assist the pastor by giving him suggestions (not orders), making him aware of needs in the church and sharing their ideas as he asks for suggestions and advice. The pastor is established by God to lead the church. By no means should the deacons try to assume the leadership of the church by telling the pastor what to do, supervising his activities or thinking that they are supposed to control the church. Deacons who serve and help with a humble spirit are a great blessing and help to the pastor and the church. Deacons who get proud and think they are in charge of things are a great hindrance to the progress and blessings of a church. Every pastor must graciously but plainly instruct the entire church on the position and responsibilities of the deacons.

. The New Testament gives a list of the qualifications for the deacons. This list tells us that they should be serious, not dishonest, drunkards or greedy, hold good doctrine, and have faithful wives and obedient children. They should have demonstrated their ability and dependability. They should also have a good reputation and not be divorced and remarried individuals. (I Timothy 3:8-13) It may be difficult for a church to find men who are qualified, but in no case should a church put men into the office of deacon who do not meet the scriptural qualifications. It is better to have less deacons than to have unqualified ones.

THE ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH

A Baptist church observes two ordinances; Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is the immersion in water of a person who has been genuinely born again and has a good testimony of salvation as well as some indication that he or she will be leading a consistent Christian life. The Lord's Supper is that memorial of Christ giving His body and shedding His blood as the sacrifice for our sins. The bread and the cup are the visible reminders of His body and blood.

These two ordinances should never be referred to as "sacraments." Sacraments are an invention of the Roman Catholics which are "signs of the grace of God," that is, they are religious ceremonies which earn some grace for the ones taking them and so help people earn

their way to heaven. The Bible plainly teaches that this is not so. Salvation is by grace which is the gift of God and we can never earn salvation by anything that we do.

Both of the ordinances are ordained by God as reminders and testimonies. Baptism reminds us of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. The Lord's Supper reminds us of Christ's body and blood which were given to purchase our salvation. Baptism is a testimony of our death to the old life and the beginning of the new life we have in Christ. The Lord's Supper is a testimony of our faith in Christ's death as the provision for our salvation. By observing the Lord's Supper we continue showing others our faith "till He comes."

Baptism is the immersion of a genuine believer. The word "baptize" means to immerse or plunge into water. Other methods, such as sprinkling or pouring water on the head are not immersion and cannot be considered scriptural baptism. Since baptism is an outward testimony of an individual's conversion, it can only be performed after a person has been saved. Of course this completely rules out the baptism of infants, because the infant cannot understand and believe the gospel yet, so is too young to experience conversion. The person who was immersed before he was saved was not baptized at all. Since he was not saved before he was immersed, his baptism cannot be a testimony of anything and therefore is not genuine baptism. If that person is later saved, he should then be scripturally baptized after his conversion.

Everyone is not to participate in the Lord's Supper. The New Testament order of events in Acts chapter 2 is: first they were saved, after this they were baptized, next they became members of the church and then they observed the Lord's Supper. (Acts 2:41-42) The Lord's Supper suggests the fellowship that the local family of believers has together as they partake of it together. If believers from another church are present as a church observes the Lord's Supper, it is certainly permissible to invite them to join the local church in participating. At the observance of the Lord's Supper people should be reminded of the requirements for salvation, baptism, and good Christian conduct before participating.

Often people ask, "Who can perform these ordinances?" Many assume that only an "ordained

minister" is qualified to baptize or conduct the Lord's Supper. This idea is one that is left over from Roman Catholic theology. They believe that the "sacrament" brings grace to the person receiving the sacrament, and this is possible because the priest received the power to provide this grace, having received this power from the bishop, who got it from the cardinal, who got it from the pope, who got it from Saint Peter. Of course, such ideas have no basis in Scripture whatsoever. The ordinances help to our spiritual lives only comes from the condition and attitude of the one taking part in the ordinance, not from some miraculous grace passed on by the one performing the ordinance. The ordinances are under the control of the local church and should only be conducted by the local church. Since the pastor is the leader of the church, it is normal that he should be the one performing the ordinances in the church. But if the pastor is incapacitated, or needs to be away, he could appoint one of the deacons to officiate in his place. If a church finds itself without a pastor, this does not mean they cannot observe the ordinances. They can agree and appoint a worthy member of the congregation, usually a deacon, to conduct a baptism or officiate at the Lord's Supper. Some may think that to do so would lower the respect people have for the ordinances, but it must be remembered that the respect for the ordinance should be because of the Lord that the ordinance represents, and not because of some superstitious reverence for the one performing the ordinance. It should also be noted that Philip, who baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, was a deacon of the church in Jerusalem and not a pastor at all. (See section on "ordination")

A CHURCH CONSTITUTION

A local church which has members, a pastor, and deacons can go on and do the Lord's work. But how will they do it? How do they admit members? What doctrines do people believe? Who will decide how the money is spent? Will they have any committees, and what will they be? Who decides how much they will pay the pastor? These are all matters that can be handled smoothly, or can result in great controversy, dissension and division. To avoid many of these problems, every church should develop a written constitution. This sounds like a very

hard job, but it is very important and should be done slowly and carefully. Later in this book you will find a sample constitution which can be used as a guide and modified to meet the needs of each particular church.

What should be included in a church constitution? Here is a list of the main things:

- The name of the church and its purpose
- A doctrinal statement, outlining the main beliefs of the church
- A church covenant, which outlines the conduct expected of the members of the church
- A section on church membership, describing who could be members and how they would become members
- A section describing how church discipline would be conducted
- A section outlining the duties and qualifications of pastors and deacons
- A section describing the church officers and committees and their responsibilities
- A section describing the business meetings and how they would be conducted.

A church constitution should be brief and easy to read. It should not try to include too many small details because particular situations will always be changing. A good constitution will help a church maintain a sound doctrinal position and help avoid many problems and disagreements. It should be reviewed with the church often to see that it is being followed. A sample constitution is included at the end of this book.

THE AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

A historic principle which Baptist congregations have always maintained down through church history, is the autonomy of the local church. In most other denominations, the churches are directly or indirectly controlled by a presbytery, synod, higher church official or a denominational board of some kind. These groups follow other forms of church government which give the ultimate right of control to some higher authority outside of the local church. Baptists have always maintained that the only authority over the local church is the authority of Christ and the Scriptures, and the only real control of the

local church is the authority of the local congregation. The local church is independent and totally responsible for making its own decisions. No outside authority has any right to tell the local church what it should do.

It is clear that in the New Testament each local congregation made its own decisions independently, free from outside control. When Christ was giving instructions about discipline in the church, he explained that if earlier attempts to correct a sinful individual failed, the matter should be brought before the church (the local congregation). If the sinning individual failed to respond to the correction of the church, then the church was to consider him as an outsider. (Matthew 18:15-18) There was no appeal to any higher authority than the local church. The local church was to act independently and no outside authority was involved.

Another example of local church autonomy is found in Acts 15. There was a problem between the church in Antioch and the church in Jerusalem. Some teachers from the church in Jerusalem had come to Antioch and were teaching false doctrine. (verses 1-2) The church in Antioch decided that Paul and Barnabas and some others should go to Jerusalem and discuss this problem with the leaders of that church. The church in Antioch paid their expenses (vs. 3) and when they arrived in Jerusalem they were received by the church (vs. 4) and were allowed to tell the church how God was saving the Gentiles through their proclamation of the gospel. Those who were promoting the false doctrine that the Gentiles would have to be circumcised and become Jews in order to be saved (vs. 1, 5) objected to Paul's teaching. The leaders and members of the church (vs. 6, 12) discussed this matter and listened to the comments of Peter and Paul. Then James, who was the main leader of the church in Jerusalem, summarized the discussion and conclusions and suggested action to the church (vs. 13-21) The whole church agreed with this suggestion (vs. 22, 25). Judas and Silas, representatives of the church in Jerusalem, along with Barnabas and Saul, were sent to inform the church in Antioch, and other churches in the area, of their decision. (vs. 25-29, 32) When they arrived in Antioch they assembled the church to hear about the action of the church in Jerusalem and they all rejoiced because the issue was resolved and sound doctrine was upheld. (vs. 30-31) There is no evidence that this was

any kind of a council meeting of churches or that any other churches were involved. It demonstrates that both of these churches, though cooperating, were acting independently to resolve a common problem.

We find further evidence of New Testament churches acting independently in other Scriptures as well. In I Corinthians 5 Paul addresses a problem of immoral conduct on the part of a member of the church. He tells them that when they had "gathered together" they should put the wicked person away from among themselves. (vs. 4, 7, 13) This was solely the action of the local church and no other organization had any jurisdiction of the matter. In II Corinthians 2:6 Paul referred to their action as "punishment which was inflicted by many," that is, the majority of the congregation. When Christ spoke to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, he told each church to take the action necessary to address their problem. The Lord did not call on any outside organization or authority to deal with the problem for them. The local congregation was the sole authority.

There are always some who disagree with the idea of independent and autonomous churches. Some would suggest that the "council in Jerusalem" shows that a meeting of church leaders could give orders to the churches. However, it has already been demonstrated that this was not a council of churches, but only two independent churches working together on a common problem. Others would say that the fact that Paul wrote to the churches and told them what to do justifies church leaders today telling churches what they should do. But there is a great difference. Paul was writing to the churches under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His comments came from God, not himself. There is no church leader today who has the ability to write directives inspired by God. There are others who say, "If we let a church become independent, it may do the wrong thing." Of course, this is always a possibility. But a church that is part of a controlling organization can also do the wrong thing. Congregations should be taught carefully and thoroughly by their founders before they are organized as a church, so when they are organized and become independent, they will likely stay on the right path. The danger of churches being unscripturally controlled by some governing organization is a greater danger than the

possibility that an independent church may go astray.

In its beginning stages, as a church is being formed, it is often under the direction of some outside authority. It may be directed by the missionary or church planter who is starting the church. It may be controlled by another local church which is helping to start a new church in that place. It may be controlled by a school or mission agency that is starting the church. Until a church is organized to govern itself, it needs to be controlled by some authority. But this only applies until the new congregation is officially organized as a church. Once it has become formally organized as a church it must, from that point on, function independently and make its own decisions. It may appeal for counsel and advice to some outside source that helped it to begin, but the final authority for making decisions is its own.

Other denominations, and even liberal Baptist Conventions, exercise authority over local churches, telling them what to do and even sending pastors from one church to another. Such actions are not only contrary to the New Testament pattern, but are also contrary to established Baptist practice over the centuries. Churches who find themselves subject to control by some outside authority should take action to either change the conduct of the authority trying to control them, or remove themselves from such an organization.

THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

The enemies of Jesus came asking Him if it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not. Jesus asked for a coin and then asked them whose picture and name were on the coin. They replied that it was Caesar's. Then Jesus issued that grand statement, "Render unto Caesar, the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." By this statement, He both recognized the legitimate claims of civil government and also made clear that there was a distinction and difference between the things that belong to Caesar and the things that belong to God. Of course, Caesar represented the civil government. Baptists have always thought it proper to maintain this distinction between the things that pertain to the earthly government and the things that pertain to God. This is called the "separation of church and state."

This distinction has not always been maintained. In Old Testament Israel, the civil government and spiritual matters were all linked together. The kings and judges were supposed to uphold the laws of God, and the prophets and priests were supposed to tell the kings what to do. Without understanding the differences between the dispensation of the Old Testament law and the dispensation of the church, some Christians carried this Old Testament idea into the new dispensation. Once the Roman rulers claimed to be Christians, they began to think they were the rulers of all the Christians, not only in civil matters, but also in religious matters and that the church was to be controlled by the Roman emperor and supported by the emperor. Over the centuries this idea spread to many countries and they developed governments with an established church as the only legal church to belong to. The churches were financially maintained by money from the civil government. To this day the governments of many countries endorse and support a particular form of religion and often make it difficult for any other religion.

Baptists have always opposed this idea. They maintain that as citizens we should be subject to the civil rules and laws of government in the material matters of this world. But they also hold that in religious matters of belief and conscience, the government of the state should have no control over what is believed, nor should they be compelled to pay taxes that support a form of religion they do not agree with.

Certainly Christians should obey the laws of their government. Scripture tells us that we should "submit to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake," (I Peter 2:13) and "be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates." (Titus 3:1) The only time that a Christian should not obey the rule of government is if that government commands him to disobey God. When the apostles were commanded by the rulers to stop preaching the gospel (which God had commanded them to do) they replied, "We ought to obey God, rather than man." (Acts 5:29)

Christians should not use their churches to promote political causes. They should be law abiding citizens in their daily conduct and use their churches for the purpose of advancing the cause of Jesus Christ.

BIBLICAL SEPARATION

One of the issues that causes much confusion and dissension among Christians is the matter of "separation." Should this church cooperate with that church or not? Should our church be part of this denomination or association, or should we separate from it because of the doctrines that they hold? Should this church work together with others in this evangelistic campaign or missionary program or should it stay separate from them? The answers to these question have great impact on the future ministry of a church or a pastor. It is good to understand the scriptural position on these matters.

It is clear that the Bible teaches that believers, or groups of believers, should separate from those who hold or promote basic doctrines that are false, or conduct that is obviously wrong. In Romans 16:17-18, Paul beseeches us to "mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." John warns that many deceivers are come into the world and tells us that if a teacher does not have the proper doctrine of Christ, you should not "receive him into your house nor bid him godspeed." (II John 7-11) In II Timothy 2:16-19, Paul tells us that we should shun and depart from those who promote false doctrine. The Old Testament prophet Amos asks the question, "How can two walk together except they be agreed?," and Paul commands specifically, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath light with darkness?" (II Corinthians 6:14-18) He then commands, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord."

What does separation involve? Separation does not mean that we cannot talk or be friendly to a person who has bad doctrine or lives in sinful conduct. A person cannot witness to lost people if he cannot talk to them. But he should not be so friendly with that person that others assume that he is in agreement with, and approves of what the other person believes or does. A church should not continue as part of a convention or association or fellowship that does not hold sound doctrine. Nor should a church or pastor cooperate in evangelistic or missionary programs with others who hold, endorse or promote false doctrine.

To cooperate with, fellowship with, or work with others who maintain false doctrine or bad conduct tells others that we think their doctrine and conduct are alright and we agree with them. To do so, compromises scriptural principles and offends the holiness and truth of our God. Some times ministers will not practice Biblical separation because to do so would cost them loss of income or support. Such ministers love the rewards of money more than the riches of Christ.

THE ORDINATION OF PASTORS

There is probably no subject that has produced more confusion and misunderstanding in Baptist churches than the subject of the ordination of pastors. It is likely that many will not want to accept the facts presented here because they are different than the views that they have held. But many problems have occurred in churches because people have not properly understood this subject. The average person in a Baptist church probably has an understanding of ordination something like this: An ordination council is held for the candidate. He is examined and the council agrees that he is qualified for the ministry. Then the pastors present gather around him, lay their hands on him, and ordain him. He is then ordained and is therefore qualified, or enabled, to pastor a church, perform baptisms, weddings, funerals, and conduct the Lord's supper. He can also use the title of "Reverend" if he so chooses. This view is generally held, but it is never found in the New Testament and has no basis in the Scriptures whatsoever. Though it may be commonly held in many Baptist churches, it is really just an idea left over from the false thinking of Roman Catholic theology.

Please consider the use of the word "ordain" in the English Bible. The first use of the English word "ordain" in the English Bible is found in Numbers 28:6. It speaks of the burnt offering "which was ordained on Mt. Sinai." Plainly, this is not referring to any ceremony that was performed, but to the beginning, or the establishment, of that particular offering. In I Kings 12:32-33, it refers twice to the feast that Jeroboam "ordained." Obviously, this means he "established" the feast. I Chronicles 9:22 mentions the 212 doorkeepers

that Samuel and David "ordained" in their office. In John 15:16, it says that believers are "ordained" to bear fruit. Mark 3:14 records the fact that Jesus "ordained" 12 men as apostles. In Acts 13:48, it refers to those who were "ordained" to eternal life. There is a reference to decrees that were "ordained" in Acts 16:4, and Jude, verse 4 refers to false teachers who were "ordained" to condemnation. So we find the word "ordained" a number of times in the English Bible. But it is not one Greek word that is consistently translated as "ordain." Instead it represents many different words that were translated "ordain." These words had the meanings of something being "set" "placed" or "established." The English translation of these words would have been less confusing if they had all been translated as "appointed" instead of "ordained." None of these references has any connection with some kind of ceremony by which men were commissioned or qualified for the gospel ministry.

Paul refers to the government officers who were "ordained of God." (Romans 13:1) Certainly it does not mean that God held some ceremony for them, but just that He established them in, or appointed them to, their office or position. In Acts 10:42 it refers to Christ, who was "ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and dead." Did God conduct a ceremony to make Christ the Judge of the quick and dead? In translating the Bible for the Burmese people, Adoniram Judson correctly translated the word "appoint" instead of "ordain" both in Acts 10:42 and in Romans 13:1.

Only three times in the New Testament the English word "ordain" is used in relation to the ministry of a preacher or pastor. In Acts 14:23 it states that Paul and Barnabas "ordained" pastors in every city. In I Timothy 1:5 Paul states that he was "ordained" a preacher, and in Titus 1:5 Paul says he left Titus in Crete so that he could "ordain" elders in every city. In each of these cases a completely different word is used in the Greek text. In the first instance, the word means "to stretch out the hand to vote for." Paul and Barnabas helped the church to choose a pastor by electing him to that office. In the second use mentioned, the word used means simply "placed." Paul was "placed" into the ministry. In Titus, the word means to "establish." Titus was to see that a pastor was established in place in every church. In each of these places Judson also accurately used the word for "appoint," instead of the

word “ordain.”

Nowhere in the New Testament is there any example of any ordination council or any ordination ceremony connected with a person assuming the position of pastor of a church. When the New Testament deals with this subject, “to ordain” means, “to install” or “to establish” as the pastor of a local congregation. There was no ordination council or ordination ceremony for Paul, but immediately after he was saved, he “straightway preached Christ” in Damascus and then in Jerusalem. (Acts 9:20, 29) There is no mention of John the Baptist or Philip being ordained, but both of them baptized people.

A well known Baptist scholar in America wrote a book in 1893 entitled “A New Directory for Baptist Churches.” This book discussed in detail the various aspects of church administration. It has been the standard work on the conduct of Baptist churches for over one hundred years. On this subject of ordination Hiscox writes, “New Testament ordination was an election, an appointment to office, and had no reference whatever to any formal induction into office; did not imply any ceremonial investiture, or setting apart to the functions of that office. The New Testament calls an election to office, ‘ordination’.” Hiscox goes on to say, “It has usually been taken for granted that the primitive ministry was inducted into office by formal services, and that ‘prayer with the laying on of hands,’ was the essential part of such ordination. But this has been accepted as scriptural, not because it is found in the Scriptures, but because Prelatical and Presbyterial authorities have interpreted the Scriptures by their own ecclesiastical usages, rather than adjusted their usages to the New Testament teaching.”

The idea that a person has to get permission from a council before he can preach or pastor a church is completely foreign to the New Testament. The idea that a group of pastors can conduct some kind of ceremony which will qualify a person for the ministry is not found in the Scriptures. If God calls a man to preach, he can preach. If a church calls a man to be their pastor, he can pastor. Neither he nor the local church needs permission or sanctions from any person or group or council. The idea that a man must have some formal ordination before he can properly pastor comes from the left over remains of Roman Catholic theology but it certainly does not come from the Scriptures. It is part of a superstitious awe that people

have in thinking that a pastor has some magical powers with God which he only possesses by having this mystical power passed on to him by "the ordination ceremony." Baptists have always believed in "the priesthood of the believer." We are a "kingdom of priests" God has made all of us "priests" (Revelation 1:6) and any believer has the same access to God that a pastor has.

This false, superstitious attitude given to the "ordination" of the pastor is strengthened by the use of the title "Reverend". The word "reverend" means, one who is revered or worshipped. This word is only used once in the entire English Bible. In Psalm 111:9, it refers to God and says "holy and reverend is His name." This plainly means that the name of God should be respected and worshipped. But where, in all of the Bible, does it even suggest that we should worship or revere any man? When the Devil wanted to be worshipped instead of God, he fell into sin. Even the angel mentioned in the book of Revelation refused to let John bow before him or worship him. (Revelation 22:8-9) If someone feels that a pastor should be called "reverend" because he is an extra holy man, dedicated to God, this is still not a good reason. Did the "ordination" make him more holy or more dedicated to God? In most churches there are a few very godly members who love the Lord, are totally dedicated to Him, live lives of prayer and are just as dedicated and godly as the pastor, maybe even more so. Should they be called "reverend" then? Of course we should not openly criticize ministers who use this title but we should recognize that there is no scriptural or logical reason for doing so. This is just a remnant of the old Roman Catholic tradition that has found its way into our churches. Respect should be given to those who are godly and do good works, but reverence should not be given to a person just because he has been "ordained" in the traditional sense.

It is understood that most of our churches have a long tradition of misunderstanding on this important subject because they have been taught improperly. Changes must be made if the Scriptures are to be followed. This does not mean that churches have to abandon all of their customs. If it is desirable, a council could still be held to examine a candidate for the ministry. But instead of "ordaining" the man, the council could pass a resolution stating that they find the man suitable for the ministry and recommend him to the churches as a person who is

qualified to serve in the ministry. Then it would be the responsibility of the local church who wished to call him to be their minister to "ordain" (appoint or install) him by any ceremony or lack of ceremony that suited them. This would provide the individual a formal recommendation and recognition of his abilities, while at the same time uphold the autonomy and independence of the local church. No council, group or agency has any right to tell the local church who can or cannot be their pastor. Only the local church can make that decision. No group can confer on anyone the ability or right to conduct the ordinances. This can properly be done only by the local church.

Following the suggestions given above would provide recognition of a person's abilities, maintain some of the sense of tradition and most importantly, uphold the autonomy of the local church.

Now, what will your response be to these thoughts on the subject of ordination? You can respond in several ways:

1. "I don't believe what has been said." So what is the Scriptural basis for what you believe?
2. "Yes, I agree with what has been said, but it is contrary to our tradition so I will ignore it." Is it more important to follow tradition than Scripture?
3. "Yes, I agree with what has been said, but we don't want to upset anyone so we will keep doing as we are doing." Is it more important to please men than follow Scripture?
4. "Yes, I understand and agree with what has been said and I will begin to work towards helping our churches to change their attitudes and practices in this area."

WHY CHANGES IN THE MATTER OF ORDINATION ARE NEEDED:

1. Because the present methods overlook and usurp the authority of the local church
2. Because the present methods promote a false and superstitious understanding of the nature and meaning of "ordination."
3. Because the present methods likely keep churches without a pastor from observing the ordinances, when the local church could probably find a worthy deacon or member to administer the ordinances until a pastor is installed.

BIBLE PREACHING

Paul's exhortation to young Timothy was, "Preach the Word." (II Timothy 4:2) Bible preaching is central to the ministry of every fundamental church. It must never take a second place to music, programs or other activities. The most important thing that a pastor does is to preach the Word of God. He is not to preach his own ideas or opinions. He must prayerfully and diligently study a passage or subject of the Bible until he understands what it says. Then he must preach that truth to his congregation. This cannot be accomplished by an hour's work on Saturday night. It probably takes the average faithful preacher most of one day to get a good sermon for his people.

God's Word is exciting. It is a sin for a preacher to make it boring and uninteresting. The preacher should be enthusiastic about his subject. He should speak on a variety of different subjects and passages. He should speak confidently and clearly. There should be variety in what he says and in the way that he says it. He should explain things clearly and plainly so that it is easy for people to understand what he means. If he uses a simple and clear outline, it will be easier for people to remember his subject.

The preacher must also apply the truths of Scripture to the lives of the people. A message should either help people understand something that will help them in their life, or change something in the way that they live so they will be more like God wants them to be. He should preach to see lives changed. This means that he must challenge them to make decisions as the Spirit of God applies the truths of God to their heart. The preacher should not be afraid to invite people to make outward decisions at the appropriate times. They could express their decision verbally, by raising a hand, by coming forward, by coming forward and kneeling, or by speaking to the pastor afterward. But there should certainly be times when he calls on people, particularly the unsaved, to demonstrate outwardly their inner decision or concern. As God works through a faithful preacher, lives will be changed.

CHURCH MEETINGS

Since a church is a body of believers, every church must have meetings when the church can assemble. A church must regularly meet on Sundays and also at other times for business meetings, prayer, and occasionally, special meetings as the congregation determines they are needed. The New Testament does not give any specific schedule for the meetings of the church, so each local congregation must determine a schedule of services that would best meet the needs of the local church.

Regular weekly meeting should be held on Sunday. In the Old Testament dispensations they rested and worshipped on the seventh day, that is Saturday. Jewish people still go to their synagogue on Saturday, but the New Testament brought a change. Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, that is, Sunday. He first met with His disciples on that Sunday night. He met with them again on the next Sunday. The apostle John referred to that day as "the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10), suggesting that it was the day set aside for the Lord. In Acts 20:7, we are told that the disciples at Troas came together on "the first day of the week," and in I Corinthians 16:2, Paul suggested that they set aside their gifts for the Lord "on the first day of the week." Early church history gives much evidence to show that the early Christians made the first day of the week (Sunday) their day for worship. Christians continue today in honoring the Lord on Sunday and making that their day of rest and worship.

The most important meeting of the week is the Sunday meeting for worship. Local congregations must decide when they should meet: Sunday morning, or afternoon, or evening, or twice during the day. The main parts of a church service are singing, prayer, and preaching. But a service could also include testimonies of praise, special music, children's participation and Scripture reading. The service should be well planned by the pastor and he should see that everyone participating knows what they are to do and when they are to do it. When possible, it is good to relate the singing and any special music to the theme of the message. It is also good to involve some of the congregation in helping with different parts of the service. Being involved helps them to develop their abilities and to use their spiritual gifts.

When possible, it is very helpful for a church to also

have a Sunday school. This could be just for children, or even better it could also include one or more classes for adults, if rooms are available. A Sunday School could meet before or after the morning service, or younger children could even meet during the service if there was a room available. Those who teach the Sunday school classes should be spiritually qualified and trained as well as possible. Usually the teachers will be learning even more than the children they teach.

It is also good for a church to have a prayer meeting. There may not be a convenient time for everyone to come, but a time that is suitable for many might be found. Some churches have a prayer meeting on a Wednesday or Friday or Saturday evening. Some churches have early morning prayer meetings. Some have a special prayer meeting for men and a meeting at another time for women. It is good for the spiritual health of people to attend a prayer meeting where they can learn to pray. Pastors should encourage everyone who is able, to pray at the prayer meetings. Sometimes it is necessary to divide into small groups for the prayer time so that all can pray. Encourage the congregation to spend a few minutes sharing prayer requests or answers to prayer. Then spend most of the time praying. Though someone might give a very short thought from the Scriptures, it is best not to turn the prayer meeting into a Bible study like many churches do. They have a Bible study and only one or two prayers. This is not really a prayer meeting. People grow more spiritually if they learn to really pray with others and see God working as His people fervently pray.

A church could also have special meetings once in a while when a visiting pastor or evangelist can come and preach for the salvation of sinners or the encouragement of God's people. Meetings of that sort could be just for one day, or several days, or for a whole week. However, the pastor should be sure that anyone he invites to preach in his church is sound in doctrine and preaches the truth. When a guest speaker is invited to preach for a church there should be an understanding before he comes about what honorarium the church will give him and what they will give him for his expenses.

Another meeting which a church must sometimes have is a business meeting. Church business meetings could be held monthly or quarterly (once every three months). A major business meeting should be held once a

year. Since the pastor is the leader of the congregation it is proper for him to be the chairman of the business meeting. Ordinarily, no business meeting should be held in the pastor's absence. However, if the church does not have a pastor, they should designate one of the deacons to be the chairman of the business meetings until a pastor is chosen.

A regular business meeting should include a report on what money had been received, how much had been spent, what it had been spent for, and how much was still available. A regular and honest accounting of the church finances to the church will increase the confidence of the people in the church leadership and encourage them to be more faithful and generous in giving. The meeting should also include a review of the minutes from the last meeting. Smaller churches could give these reports and minutes orally if necessary. At the business meeting the church could also vote on receiving new members into the membership or sometimes act on necessary cases of church discipline. They could also act on any decisions that the church needs to make or decide on plans for the future.

Business meetings should be conducted in a serious and orderly fashion. Only members of the church should be allowed to vote or enter into the discussion of business matters. Discussion of issues should be encouraged but people should be taught not to be offensive, harsh or disrespectful in these discussions. It must be stressed that it is alright to disagree, but it is not alright to be disagreeable. The pastor should gently correct anyone who speaks in a non-Christian manner.

Meetings that are prayerfully planned and properly conducted will provide a good testimony to the community and attract others to attend. Every effort should be made to start meetings on time and to end them at approximately the same time each week. A pastor should teach his people the necessity of faithfulness to the meetings of the church in accordance with the instructions of Hebrews 10:25. A church should recognize that, even though others may offer helpful suggestions, the pastor is ultimately responsible for the conduct of all of the meetings of the church. Others who are participating in the service, such as in song leading, special music or in other ways, are only to do so with his approval.

CHURCH FINANCES

How can a church have enough money to do the things that it needs to do? Churches get money in many different ways. In some countries the government helps support the state endorsed church. Some churches raise money by holding sales and sponsoring church dinners. Some churches wait for some rich man or some Christian in another part of the world to send them money. But none of these methods are taught in the scriptures. God's basic plan for meeting the financial needs of the local church is for that church to be supported by the tithes and offerings of the people in the church.

The word "tithe" means "tenth." According to the Bible a tenth of all of our income, whether it be the fruit of our trees, the grain of the field, the animals of our flocks or money received for wages, belongs to the Lord. "The tithe is the Lord's" (Leviticus 27:30) If God's people do not give the Lord the tithe that belongs to him, God considers such a person to be a thief and robber. (Malachi 3:8).

Some would suggest that tithing was part of the law of Moses and so does not apply to this dispensation. The truth is, tithing has been taught and practiced in all dispensations and is just as applicable now as it ever was. When Abel brought his animal for a sacrifice, he was probably bringing God the tithe. When Abraham came back from his victory over the kings, he gave the priest, Melchizedek, "a tithe of all". (Genesis 14:20) Jacob promised God that he would give the Lord the tithe. (Genesis 28:22) This was all before the laws of Moses. Of course, Moses' laws taught tithing as well. In the New Testament Jesus said it was proper to give tithes of everything. (Luke 11:42) When Paul said that everyone should give "as God has prospered him," (I Corinthians 16:2) he certainly had the proportionate giving of tithing in mind. Every pastor of a local church should clearly and often teach the principle of tithing to his congregation. It should not be thought that it is improper or greedy for the pastor to teach about money. Jesus talked about money more than he talked about heaven and hell. Since the Bible plainly teaches that God blesses when His people give, (Malachi 3:10, II Corinthians 9:6) the pastor who teaches on these things will help his people to enjoy the blessings of God and will see the needs of the church met.

Sometimes pastors complain that their

congregations are too poor to tithe. Nowhere in the Bible is poverty a proper excuse for not giving God His tithe. The person who gives a tenth to God will find that the nine tenths that he has left will go further than the ten tenths would have gone if he had kept the tithe instead of giving it to the Lord. If the members of a church will faithfully tithe, that church will be able to do all that God expects it to do.

It is very important that a church handle all of its finances carefully and properly. When Paul was asked by the churches to go about and collect gifts to help the poor at Jerusalem he took great care to see that "no man should blame us in this abundance which is ministered by us: providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of man." (II Corinthians 8:20-21) Paul saw to it that he was accompanied in this project by men of good reputation who were chosen by the churches to help in this important matter. (II Corinthians 8:17-23)

Each church should have a faithful man of good reputation to serve as treasurer. Each Sunday two honest individuals should count the money together and record the amount received. The church should have some kind of budget or plan for how the money is to be spent. The treasurer should only disperse the funds as directed by the church. Funds should be kept in a safe place where they would not be in danger. A wise pastor will not have anything directly to do with the counting, keeping or spending of the money. Too many pastors fall into temptation because they have access to the church's money without proper accountability. Regular reports should be given to the church about how much money has been received, how it has been spent, and how much is still in the treasury.

Sometimes, churches get into big disagreements about how to spend their money. Once a year the pastor and deacons should recommend to the church a plan (budget) for what the monthly expense would probably be. After the church votes to approve this plan, the treasurer would then disperse the funds according to the budget adopted by the church. Of course expenses in any month may be a little larger or smaller than the plan suggested, but as long as it looks like the monthly expenses will average out for the year, there is not a problem. If the treasurer sees that the expenses are becoming significantly more than the budget, he should report this to the church so that the church can decide what to do about

it. If extra funds accumulate in the church treasury, the pastor and deacons may suggest some special project which is not in the budget, for the church to consider. If the church approves of the plan, the treasurer would then disperse the funds in accordance with the wishes of the church. Following these principles will greatly reduce the danger of problems and dissension in a church.

All churches have many areas where money could be spent. They could build or improve a building, send out missionaries, buy Christian literature, start an orphanage or use their funds for many other things. A church must establish proper priorities so they put the most important things first in their spending plans. The number one, most important thing for a church to do with its finances, is to properly support its pastor. If a church does not support a pastor so that he can care for his family and have his needs met without spending much time and concern about how he will live, that church cannot go forward. A church is much better able to grow and be effective if the pastor can devote all of his energies into the work of the Lord. If a church has to choose to use their available money for a pastor or a building, they should always choose to support the pastor first. If a good pastor is well supported he will probably be able to build up the congregation so they will soon be able to have a building anyway. Paul has made it very clear, that it is important and proper for the church to support their pastor. “The laborer is worthy of his hire.” (I Corinthians 9:5-11, I Timothy 5:17-18) God will bless a church that takes good care of a faithful pastor.

THE PASTOR AND CHURCH BUSINESS

Since the pastor is the leader and overseer of the church, this means that he must be concerned about the business activities of the church as well. Some churches have the notion that the pastor is only to be involved with the spiritual affairs of the church and the deacons or some other group is to take care of the material affairs of the church. This is neither a scriptural nor a sensible approach to proper church operations. A pastor may delegate some of the details of church business to deacons or committees, but he is still responsible to oversee them and to insure that they are doing the jobs that have been entrusted to them. The business affairs of a church

(money, buildings, future plans, individuals with needs, business meetings, etc.) are all important to a church and cannot be overlooked or ignored by the pastor. It is his responsibility to lead and to oversee these things.

How does church business usually proceed? As the leader of the flock, the pastor should have an idea about where the flock should go. As he considers the situation of the church, discusses its needs with deacons and members, and prays about its progress, he may develop an idea of what the church should do. He should then discuss this with the deacons. If they cannot agree, they should set the idea aside, at least for a while, or else abandon it entirely. If they agree on the need, the idea should then be recommended to the church. It should be explained in detail, along with the advantages and the possible difficulties. The church could then either vote yes or no on the matter, or set the matter aside until a later meeting, giving more time for prayer and further consideration. If the church approves the plan, then they may proceed. If the church rejects the plan, it must be set aside, at least for a time. The pastor or deacons should not push the matter through by using strong tactics to get it approved. To do so only results in dissension.

It is also possible for a church member or deacon to get an idea which the pastor has not thought of. They should not bring it up at a business meeting, but should instead suggest it to the church officers (pastors and deacons) to consider and proceed as discussed above. Church members should be taught that every member can search the Scriptures and pray about the progress of the church because each one has the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. They should also be taught that members need to accept the majority decision of the church and cooperate with it unless it involves a clear departure from Bible doctrine or conduct.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

In a good home, the parents must use discipline or else the children will be very unruly. A church that does not exercise discipline will find that its members easily become inactive, worldly or ungodly. It is never easy or pleasant for a church to exercise church discipline, but it is absolutely necessary if we are to maintain churches that follow the pattern of the New Testament. Paul shows us

that God's ultimate goal for a church is that it should be "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:27) Of course no church will be that perfect on this earth, but neither should any church contain members who are continually living in open sin. A church must exercise vigilance and good discipline to avoid such a condition.

The New Testament has many examples and admonitions on this subject. In I Corinthians chapter 5, Paul deals with a problem of immorality by a member of the church in Corinth and instructs them to expel the sinning member. (I Corinthians 5:5, 7, 13) In II Thessalonians Paul tells them to withdraw from, and have no company with those who were lazy and not working. (II Thessalonians 3:6,14) In Acts 5 there is the case of Ananias and Saphira, who lie to the church, are confronted about their sin by Peter, and God removes them by causing them to die because of their disgrace to the testimony of the church. Paul also notes that there are times when a sinning individual has to be rebuked in front of the entire congregation. (I Timothy 5:20) In addition, there are the Lord's instructions about discipline in Matthew 18, which will be discussed in detail later.

Some of the sins which may demand church discipline would include things like:

- A grievous difficulty between two members
- Promoting false doctrine
- Serious disregard for following the church covenant
- Unfaithful attendance at the church meetings
- Gossip and troublemaking, causing divisions in the church
- Grievous sin harming the testimony of the church, such as: immorality, drunkenness, profanity, wordliness, etc.

It should be understood that the purpose of church discipline is to instruct and correct the erring person. The primary goal is his restoration to full fellowship with the Lord and the church. Church discipline should never be used out of spitefulness, or with a desire to "get even." It must be done in love and carried forward by those "who are spiritual", seeking to restore such a one in the spirit of meekness. (Galatians 6:1)

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus gives a very clear pattern to be followed in cases where discipline is

necessary. First, the person who is hurt by the sin of the other should go to that person alone and try to explain the sin to the brother. He should not be talking to other people about the problem at all until he has taken the first, basic step. If the one who sinned listens and repents, he is to be forgiven and the problem is solved. If he will not deal with the sin, the person is to take one or two others along with him to see the sinning brother again. If he cannot find one or two who will go with him, it may be that the fault is on his part, not on the part of the other. If the sinning brother listens to the two or three that come to see him and repents, then the problem is solved. However, if he still will not repent of his sin, the matter should be brought before the church so that the church can hear the matter. If the church agrees that the person is indeed in sin, then maybe he will listen to the whole church and repent. If the church exhorts him to repent and he will not, then the church is to exclude him and put him outside of the membership. Once he is excluded from the church, the members of the church should not have fellowship with him as if he had done nothing wrong, but neither should they "count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." (II Thess. 3:15)

In cases where serious or open sin is involved, it is usually best if the pastor and deacons take the initiative in carrying out disciplinary matters. Of course, any member can proceed with discipline but they should be taught that they are never to bring a matter before the church until they have followed the proper steps which precede this. In most cases, it would be best for them to review the matter with the church officers before proceeding very far.

Since church discipline is always a very difficult thing, it should be always carried out carefully and with much prayer. But it should not be avoided and allowed to go undone. As Hiscox states in his excellent book, "When these regulations fall into disuse, and the good order of the body is neglected, it becomes weak and inefficient, neither commanding the confidence of its own members, nor the respect of the world."

THE MUSIC PROGRAM OF THE CHURCH

The soul of a church is expressed in its music. It is vital that every church strive to have good singing in its services. The pastor of a church must take a personal interest in the music of his church and see that it is a

blessing to the people and brings glory to God. Music has always been important to God and God's people. There was singing in heaven when the world was formed (Job 38:7) Miriam led Israel in singing when the Lord led them through the Red Sea. David had large choirs organized to sing the praises of God. The book of Psalms was used as a song book for God's people. Jesus and the disciples sang a song at the conclusion of the last supper. Paul exhorts us to be "speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:19) The book of Revelation describes singing in heaven. Christians worship God by singing His praises from their hearts.

It is important to note that the primary purpose of music is not to provide enjoyment for the believers. Many say, "we will use a certain kind of music because that is what young people enjoy." It is true that Christians enjoy good and godly music, but God did not give us music mainly for our enjoyment. The primary purpose of music is to praise and glorify God. When we sing, we sing to God. "O sing unto the Lord a new song, sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord…" (Psalm 96:1-2) Psalm 150 reminds us that all kinds of music, from both instruments and voices, are to be used to praise God. People should be taught that they are not singing to please people, or to have people notice them, but they are singing for the Lord.

Singing is to be a blessing to other people. We are to be "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." This means that the words of our singing must teach scriptural truths and be helpful to encourage others.

Pastors should take the lead in seeing to it that there is always good singing in the church meetings. Perhaps the pastor can use an able person in the congregation as a song leader. When song books are lacking, it is good to have the congregation memorize some songs, or perhaps simple song sheets with a few songs could be provided. Care should be taken to see that all of the songs used express correct doctrine and glorify God.

The greatest danger faced by Bible believing churches today, is the introduction of worldly Christian music (Contemporary Christian Music, often called CCM) chiefly from America and England. This kind of music is very popular with young people because it is the same as

the worldly music that they see on television and hear on tapes and disks. This music is produced by Christians who love the world instead of separating from it. Its rock beat, worldly sound and the worldly appearance of these performers appeal to the old sinful nature of young people (and some older people as well).

Those who promote this CCM music always justify it by a simple reason: they say, "young people like this kind of music (rock music) and so we will put some Christians words to it, and do it just like the movie and TV entertainers do. Then the unsaved young people will come to hear the music, and we can preach to them so they can be saved." This may sound like good reasoning to some, but it has some serious errors. First, music in the Bible was never used to entertain or appeal to the unsaved world. It was used to glorify God and edify believers. Secondly, God's people are to "sing a new song" (Psalm 96:1), not the old songs of the unsaved world. Thirdly, most of the promoters of CCM emphasize "Christian Concerts" where the crowds can come, pay their money, and listen to the music, but there is very little, if any real gospel preaching at all. Further, the words of the songs are so weak and meaningless that they convey very little real Bible truth, if any. It is also fairly obvious, that most of the Christian young people who use CCM music, really do it for their own enjoyment, and not to reach the lost at all. Finally, we must understand that there is no scriptural basis for the notion that "the end justifies the means." In other words, it is never right to do the wrong thing in order to accomplish the right thing.

In America, CCM music has been instrumental in dividing and destroying many churches. The majority of evangelical churches in America have been significantly weakened by this dangerous form of music. Once a church starts using it, it is almost impossible to turn back to the old godly music it used to use. Good congregational singing dies out as the churches more and more listen to the entertainers performing the CCM music. Instead of being loyal to the local church, people begin running about to wherever a "group" is going to "perform." Money that should be in the offerings of the local church is used to purchase tapes and CD's of CCM while other money is spent on tickets to pay for concerts.

It is foolish to think that it is possible to use worldly music to get people to become spiritual. The whole

emphasis of CCM is to appeal to the old, sinful and carnal nature instead of to glorify God. Instead of building up churches by bringing about many conversions, it weakens and destroys them.

Many pastors do not have any training in music and may not know how to recognize and identify CCM music. Here are some of the things that identify it:

- It doesn't sound like the old music that churches have used before.
- It has a very heavy beat, almost always accented by drums. (which were never used in worship or by God's people anywhere in the Bible)
- The melody is usually very hard to sing.
- Usually the singing is led by a "praise group" or "worship team."
- Song books become unimportant and the congregation does not do much singing.
- The words are emotional and center mainly on man's experience instead of on God.
- It copies the style of Hollywood entertainers, emphasizing the manners and expressions of the singers.
- It emphasizes pictures, labels, posters and concerts of the entertainers. (musicians)
- It encourages "clapping" for the performers because they are the ones receiving the praise instead of God.

This unscriptural type of music should never be allowed in churches that seek to follow the Bible and glorify God. CCM should be recognized as carnal and worldly music which has no place in a Christian church.

Sometimes churches like to use "special music" in their services. This can be a good thing if the right kind of music is used and it is done in the right way. Groups of individuals, choirs, youth choirs or children's choirs can be used. When musical instruments are used, or solo singers, care must be taken to be sure they are not using CCM music. The congregation should not glorify the musicians by "clapping" for them. Too often, solo singers or musicians are just performing their music for the sake of their own pride instead of to worship God. The pastor, or someone who is helping him, should watch over all of the music of the church and be sure that it is the right kind of music. A pastor must be ready to say, "No, we will not use that music in this church". Since God has made the pastor the overseer and leader of the church, it is his right and

responsibility to do this. Once bad music begins to be used, it will be increasingly difficult to stop it, because of the worldly desires of many people. Good music will draw the soul closer to God. CCM music will appeal to the sinful lusts of the flesh.

YOUTH MINISTRIES

Young people are a very important part of the ministry of every church. They are usually willing to learn and can be very enthusiastic workers for the cause of Christ. Every church should give much attention to the youth of the church and their needs. They should also seek to reach other young people with the message of the gospel. Young people can be involved in witnessing and calling. They can help by teaching Sunday School classes and also help in the music of the church if they do not use CCM. Churches can hold weekly youth meetings and schedule special youth activities and other events. Churches of the same doctrinal position can sometimes work together to conduct a large area youth event or activity to try to reach unsaved teens.

However, all teen activities must be closely supervised or else they can easily drift into worldly or carnal activities or begin using bad music. It is usually very foolish to put a young person, or several young persons in complete charge of the youth activities, because they may not have the spiritual maturity to see that things are done properly and spiritually. Certainly the youth can do much of the work and preparation for their various activities, but some good adult leader in the church should be in charge of working with them to guide and oversee their activities. The youth leader should be someone with spiritual discernment who loves and understands young people and is appointed by the pastor or church to work with them. He should work with them to see that they are involved in all of the regular meetings of the church and also helping out in the ministries of the church wherever they are able. It is not good to allow young people to develop a program that seems to be independent of the local church. They need to understand that they are part of the local church and accountable to the church for their manner of life and activities. Each congregation should be reminded often to pray for the youth of the church.

FELLOWSHIPS OF CHURCHES

Even though each local church should be independent and self governing, it is very good for churches of like faith and practice to have fellowship with one another. This can be done informally by likeminded churches just getting together for a meeting of some kind, or through pastors in an area meeting together for prayer or preaching. Sometimes churches prefer to organize a fellowship, which is a simple association of likeminded churches, who share the same doctrinal position and wish to work together on some common projects and meet together occasionally for preaching, fellowship and discussion of common problems or projects.

These fellowships do not need a large and complicated organization. Human nature enjoys the prestige of being an officer in an organization, but the Lord's work is to reach the lost and build churches, not prideful egos. A fellowship of churches usually only needs two or three leaders or officers chosen by the group. The only purpose of those officers would be to plan and prepare for whatever meetings the fellowship may have and to help set forward any projects that the fellowship has agreed on. Good projects for a fellowship could be to start a new church someplace, to send out a missionary or even to work together to develop a Bible school or orphanage.

It must be understood that the fellowship cannot demand that any church in the fellowship do anything. Any joint actions of the fellowship must be on a voluntary basis for each local church. The fellowship would have no authority to tell any church what to do, who their pastor should be, or anything else. A fellowship could offer suggestions to a church about possible candidates for the office of pastor, or some other matter, but must be careful not to try to have any control over any local church.

EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

Every church should be concerned with reaching the lost and winning them to Christ. When Jesus promised His disciples the power of the Holy Spirit, He told them that they were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8) That is, they were to witness to those in their own city, in the areas near them, in the areas further away

from them, and on to the rest of the world. This is still our pattern today.

Every church should be making an effort to win people to the Lord from the area around their church. Then they should also be concerned about starting churches in near by areas, in other parts of the country and even sending missionaries to other parts of the world. Evangelism should be emphasized often. Prayer meetings should pray for lost people. Church members should be encouraged to bring their friends to hear the preaching of the Word. Pastors should see that they teach people in the church how to witness and how to lead a person to Christ. Sometimes churches close to one another can work together to start a church in another town. Churches can challenge their young people to go to Bible school and become evangelists and missionaries. Missionaries can be financially supported so they can take the gospel to other areas. Churches that are not actively trying to reach others become stagnant and dead. The world is lost and the gospel must be proclaimed.

ORGANIZING A NEW CHURCH

Suppose that a missionary or evangelist goes to a town and preaches the gospel. A number of people are saved and begin meeting for Bible study and worship. They are growing in the Lord and starting to reach others. God is obviously blessing. But a group of people holding meetings is not yet a church. At what point should a church be organized, and how is it done?

The New Testament does not explain exactly how this should be done, but following are some practical suggestions that could serve as a guide in organizing a new church.

First, the church planter should begin instructing people on the basic truths of a church: a regenerated membership, baptism, the Lord's Supper, church officers, tithing, etc. After some time the people will begin asking when and how they can organize as a church. Usually it is best to wait until there are at least five men who show definite evidence of conversion, are faithful and dependable and are willing to become part of a new church. Then the church planter should begin meeting with them and writing a church constitution. Many things in the constitution, including the section on church officers

and the doctrinal statement, would be based on Scripture so would not be subject to anyone's personal opinion. Other things, such as the name of the church, method of receiving members, how often to hold business meetings, etc., would be areas where the prospective members could voice their opinions.

After a constitution is written (see later in this book for a sample constitution) the group could be asked privately to see how many were willing to become charter members of the church (assuming that they were meeting the qualifications for membership and agreeing to the constitution, including the doctrinal statement and covenant). If a sufficient number were willing to do so, they could proceed to set a date for the organizational meeting. However, they should not proceed with plans for an organizational meeting until they have privately agreed on who will pastor the new church once it is organized. Most often the church planter would plan to accept the position of pastor or else he would have brought another person there to work with him in developing the church who would be willing to serve as the pastor. If no one was available and acceptable to serve as pastor, the church should not organize until a potential pastor was available. If there were other fundamental Baptist churches or pastors in the area, they could be invited to attend the organizational meeting as observers and as an encouragement to the new church.

A suggested order of the proceedings of the organizational meeting follows:

- **Song, scripture reading and prayer**
- **Welcome to visiting pastors and members of other churches and any local dignititaries**
- **Statement of the purpose of the meeting-to organize the (name of) church**
- **Ask those who have agreed to become charter members of the church to come forward, give their testimony of salvation and sign the charter church roll (it is assumed that these people would have been screened by the church planter and would meet the qualifications for members)**
- **One of the charter members would then make a motion to call (name) to become the pastor of the church. This would then be voted on and passed by those who had signed the charter.**
- **The pastor called would then express his willingness to**

accept the position and become the official chairman of the meeting.

- He would then call for a motion to accept the proposed constitution as the constitution of the church. This would then be voted on and passed.
- Finally, he would call for a motion that the (name of church) be declared to be duly organized under the constitution as adopted, with (name) as the pastor. This would then be voted on and passed

NOTE: These are simply general suggestions about how a meeting could proceed and they can be revised and adapted according to the wishes of the pastor and people planning the meeting.

PUTTING THESE THINGS INTO PRACTICE

No one can force any pastor or any church to follow any of these suggestions. However, these thoughts are the result of much study and much experience in the pastoral ministry. Except for some practical ideas, the principles set forth come from the teachings and principles of Scripture. They at least deserve the careful consideration of the reader. Probably the most significant matters for the progress of local churches would be a better understanding of the roles of pastors and deacons, a clarification of the matters of church membership and church discipline, and a reevaluation of the meaning and significance of ordination.

No pastor or church should attempt to immediately make drastic changes in their local church in an effort to conform to some of the principles set forth in this book. To do so would produce confusion and conflict. Rather, the pastor should identify particular areas where changes may be in order and then study them from the scriptures with his deacons and other leaders. When they understand the need for changes and show the others in the church the need for those changes, then changes can be made in an orderly manner with a spirit of unity.

It is the prayer of the author that these simple suggestions would prove to be helpful in strengthening the ministry of local churches for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Your Servant in Christ,
Pastor James R. Hines
Brentwood Baptist Church

SAMPLE

CHURCH COVENANT AND CONSTITUTION

PLEAE NOTE: THE FOLLOWING SAMPLE IS SIMPLY A GOOD GUIDE FOR CHURCHES TO FOLLOW IF THEY NEED TO DEVELOP OR IMPROVE THEIR CONSTITUTION. ANY PART CAN BE CHANGED TO SUIT THE NEEDS OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION. IT IS NOT GOOD TO TRY TO INCLUDE EVERY POSSIBLE THING IN A CONSTITUTION. IF IT IS TOO LARGE, NO ONE WILL READ IT AND IT BECOMES USELESS. IT IS ONLY IMPORTANT TO COVER THE BASIC MATTERS. SMALLER MATTERS CAN BE DECIDED AND EASILY ALTERED AT A CHURCH BUSINESS MEETING. PRINT THAT IS IN ITALICS AND CAPITOL LETTERS INDICATE MATTERS THAT NEED TO BE SUITED TO THE NEEDS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH AND SHOULD BE FILLED IN AS SEEN FIT.

PREAMBLE

We, the members of (name of church), do mutually agree to be governed by the following principles which we establish as the constitution of this church.

ARTICLE I – NAME

The name of this church shall be the (NAME OF CHURCH)

ARTICLE II – OBJECT

The object of this church shall be the building up of believers through worship, fellowship and the preaching and teaching of God’s Word, so that they can carry out the Great Commission of evangelizing the world.

ARTICLE III – DOCTRINE

THE SCRIPTURES

We believe that every word in the original writings of the old and New Testaments is fully inspired of God and without error, and that these writings are our final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

GOD

We believe the Godhead exists eternally in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and these three, being equal in every divine perfection, are one God, infinite in every excellence.

Jesus Christ

We believe in the absolute deity of Jesus Christ, who united a perfect divine nature and a perfect human nature, was begotten of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. We also believe in His bodily death, resurrection, and ascension, His present ministry of intercession, and His personal imminent return for His Church.

The Holy Spirit

We believe in the personality and absolute deity of the Holy Spirit, who regenerates, baptizes, seals, indwells, and teaches all true believers in Christ.

Man

We believe that man, being created by a direct act of God as a free moral being without sin, sinned and thereby incurred the penalty of physical and spiritual death for himself and the entire human race. As a result of his sin all men are sinful by nature and totally incapable of doing anything which would have merit before God.

Salvation

We believe that salvation is wholly of grace and can be obtained by real, personal faith in the person and substitutionary death of Jesus Christ as Savior; and that it alone provides the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.

The Security of the Believer

We believe that all true believers are children of God and eternally secure in salvation.

The Christian Life

We believe that the normal Christian life should be controlled by the Holy Spirit, separated from the world and dedicated to the service of God.

The Church

We believe that the universal, invisible church is composed of all believers, began at Pentecost and will be taken at the Rapture; and that the local visible church is a congregation of baptized believers organized for worship, instruction, fellowship and service, that this local church is

independent and autonomous and that the only authority over it is that of Christ and the Word of God.

The Ordinances

We believe that every Christian should be baptized in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, both as a reminder of Christ's death, burial and resurrection, and as a symbol of that individual's inward regeneration. Only the immersion of a regenerated individual can be considered real baptism. We believe that the Lord's Supper is that memorial of Christ's death which is to be faithfully and properly observed by true believers until He returns.

Satan

We believe in the existence of Satan as a distinct, evil personality. As the head of all fallen angels and the ungodly god of this age, he is the author of all powers of darkness and sin, and he is destined to eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire.

The Future

We believe in the blessed hope of the imminent, premillennial return of the Lord for His church, which will be followed by the tribulation, the millennial reign of Christ on earth, the final condemnation and eternal punishment of the unsaved and the eternal blessedness of the saved.

Article IV – Church Covenant

Having been led by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior, and on the profession of our faith having been baptized, we do now in the presence of God and this assembly most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another.

We promise therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this church in scriptural knowledge and holiness, to faithfully attend its regular weekly services, to submit to its discipline and to contribute regularly to its support.

We also promise to maintain family and private devotions, to bring up our children in the Christian way of life, to seek the salvation of our family and friends, to be honest in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our conduct, to abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating

drink as a beverage, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We further promise to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer, to aid each other in sickness and distress, to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech, to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rule of our Savior to secure it without delay.

Humbly confessing our sins, we pray for grace and strength to keep this covenant in letter and in Spirit to the glory of God.

ARTICLE V – MEMBERSHIP

SECTION A

The membership of this church shall consist of those persons who have publicly confessed Christ as personal Savior, been baptized according to the Scriptural pattern, and are in agreement with the constitution of this church, including the Doctrinal Statement, the Church Covenant, and the other Articles of the Constitution.

SECTION B

(HERE DESCRIBE THE PROCESS YOU WISH TO FOLLOW IN HAVING PEOPLE JOIN THE CHURCH. YOU MAY HAVE THEM MEET WITH THE PASTOR, OR THE DEACONS TO GIVE THEIR TESTIMONY OF SALVATION,, OR GIVE THEIR TESTIMONY TO THE CHURCH. THEN THE CHURCH SHOULD VOTE TO RECEIVE THEM AS MEMBERS. IF PERSONS HAVE NOT BEEN BAPTIZED, THE CHURCH WOULD VOTE TO BAPTIZE THEM AND THEY WOULD THEN BECOME MEMBERS AS SOON AS THEY WERE BAPTIZED.)

SECTION C

Members may be removed from the church membership only by:

1. ***Death***
2. ***Moving to another church in another place. The church would give them a letter of recommendation to the new church and remove them from the membership of this church***

3. ***Exclusion (See Article VI)***

4. Dismissal – A member may be dismissed from the membership by vote of the church if one or more of the following is true:

   a. ***The person has moved to a distant place or the church has lost contact with him***

   b. ***The person has not attended a church service for six months or more***

ARTICLE VI – DISCIPLINE OF MEMBERS

SECTION A

Discipline is that procedure including Christian teaching, training, admonition and rebuke, both public and private, with the view to helping the individual Christian grow in grace, mature in the faith, break off from worldliness and live wholly for the Lord. At such time that a member shall refuse to receive such help it will be necessary for the church to exclude him from its membership.

SECTION B

Matters demanding church discipline shall be:

1. ***Sins known by the church or the general public.***

2. ***Holding or propagating false doctrine.***

3. ***Failure to abide by the church covenant; such as failure to faithfully attend the regular service without reasonable excuse, failure to contribute to the church, failure to be reconciled to another, etc.***

SECTION C

Discipline shall proceed according to the pattern in Matthew 18:15-17. A person bringing a matter into the public or before the church before following this procedure shall be subject to rebuke.

SECTION D

A member who has a case of church discipline proceeding against him cannot speak at business meetings, except at the hearing, and is deprived of his right to vote.

SECTION E

If the serious or public nature of the sin(s) seems to demand it, or if there is doubt as to the sincerity of the repentance, the church may exclude the accused member even though he repents.

SECTION F

An excluded member can be received back into membership only after repentance and public confession of the sin(s) and following the constitutional procedure for being admitted.

ARTICLE VII – ORGANIZATION

SECTION A

The government of this church is vested in the membership. It recognizes no outside authority of any convention, organization or other outside group, but is only subject to Christ and the Holy Scriptures

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SECTION B

THE OFFICES OF THIS CHURCH SHALL BE PASTOR, (THAT IS ELDERS OR BISHOPS) AND DEACONS.

SECTION C – PASTORS

1. ***The duties of the pastor(s) shall pertain to the general oversight of the life and services of the church. The pastor(s) shall have ex-officio representation in all organizations and committees and if present, shall act as moderator in meetings of the church.***
2. ***The qualifications of a pastor are those given in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.***
3. ***If the church desires, it may have more than one pastor. If there is a more than one pastor, one pastor shall be designated as the head pastor and any other pastors shall work under his direction.***
4. ***Pastor(s) shall serve for an undesignated period of time and shall have a written agreement with the church.***
5. ***When calling a salaried pastor, the following procedures shall be followed:***
    a. ***If the man is being called to add to the pastoral***

staff, the pastor shall present suitable candidates to the church, who will approve or disapprove of the candidate at a business meeting.

b. ***If the man is being called to replace the administrative pastor, the deacons, with any other pastors, shall constitute a committee to present suitable candidates. Only one candidate shall be considered and voted upon at a time.***

SECTION D – DEACONS

1. ***The deacons shall act as the servants of the church and assist the pastor in caring for the material affairs of the church and in other ways as he may request.***
2. ***Their qualifications are those given in Acts 6:1-6 and I Timothy 3:8-13. No deacon shall be elected unless he meets these qualifications.***
3. ***Deacons shall be elected to serve for no more than (NUMBER) years. (YOU MAY WANT TO SPECIFY HOW MANY TERMS A DEACON CAN SERVE AND IF SOME SHOULD SERVE FOR DIFFERENT LENGTH OF TERMS SO THAT YOU DO NOT GET ALL NEW DEACONS AT ONE TIME)***
4. ***The following officers shall be elected annually by the church from among the deacons:***
   a. ***<u>A Church Treasurer</u>, who shall supervise the care of the finances of the church, seeing that funds are properly supervised, records kept, monies dispersed, and reports issued in a manger agreed on by the officers of the church***

   b. ***<u>A Church Clerk</u>, who shall keep an accurate record of all business meetings, and keep an accurate record of the church membership, reporting on it at the annual meeting.***

<u>(NOTE:</u> BY SELECTING THE CHURCH OFFICERS FROM AMONG THE DEACONS, IT IS GUARANTEED THAT THEY MEET THE SPIRITUAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR THIS JOB)

SECTION E—SUNDAY SCHOOL DIRECTOR (USE ONLY IF NEEDED)

The church may also elect a Sunday School Director who shall work under the pastor(s) in overseeing and coordinating the work of the Sunday School, and other training activities. In no case shall the Sunday School Director make use of unsaved teachers or workers for activities related to the teaching ministry of the church.

The appointments to
SECTION F (THIS SECTION COULD BE USED IF YOU THINK IT APPROPRIATE, BUT IT MIGHT NOT BE NECESSARY)

We believe that lasciviousness, fornication, adultery, homosexual or lesbian conduct, abortion, and drug abuse, including the use of tobacco and the drinking of alcohol, are wrong, based on the express statements or plain principles of the Bible. This church will not knowingly hire, or retain on the hired staff of the church or its ministries, any person who practices, promotes, or condones any of the above-mentioned activities.

ARTICLE VIII – MEETINGS AND ELECTIONS

SECTION A

THE CHURCH SHALL HOLD ITS REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING

(SPECIFY WHEN IT WILL BE HELD, IT COULD BE MONTHLY OR QUARTERLY)

SECTION B

Special business meetings may be called by a pastor, the deacons, or at the written request of ten voting members. Notice of such a meeting must be made from the pulpit at three regular services.

SECTION C

The annual meeting shall be held (SPECIFY WHEN IT WILL BE HELD)

SECTION D

(SPECIFY WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE MEMBERSHIP HAS TO BE PRESENT IN ORDER TO CONDUCT A BUSINESS MEETING - ONE HALF, 60% OR WHATEVER)

SECTION E

The church may form various committees from time to time as the need arises. Committee appointments should be approved by the church. Committees should report regularly to the church and be dissolved when they are no longer needed.

ARTICLE IX – AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS

SECTION A

No auxiliary group shall organize without first receiving authority from the church to do so.

SECTION B

All officers of auxiliary organizations shall be members of the church.

SECTION C

Each organization shall make a complete report to the church at the annual meeting.

ARTICLE XI – AMENDMENT

This constitution may be amended at any regular business meeting, provided notice has been given of the proposed amendment at six regular services of the church. A unanimous vote is required to amend Articles III – VII. A majority vote is sufficient to amend other articles.

GUIDELINES FOR TRANSLATIONS

If this book, by God's grace, proves to be helpful to the churches, it may be that some would desire to have it translated into another language. I hereby grant permission for it to be translated and printed in other languages if the following conditions are carefully met:

1. **When translating, more emphasis should be placed on carefully translating the ideas expressed rather than attempting to make a word by word translation. The translator should first be sure that he understands the idea presented, and then make the translation.**

2. **When quoting verses from the Bible, the verse should be copied directly from the Bible translation used by the people who will be reading it, instead of translating the verse as it appears in this book.**

3. **When giving Scripture references, the reference should be checked to see if it is the same as the Bible the readers will use, because occasionally the**

numbering of verses is a little different in some translations.

4. Special care should be given when translating the sections about pastors, deacons and ordination, because these passages deal with important words as they appear in the English Bible and must be translated properly in order to be properly understood.

5. In no case will a translator leave out or add to any section of this book. Nor should a translator do anything that will change the doctrines or content of this book.

6. The person translating this book is required to have another person trained in the language and theology carefully review his translation for accuracy and discuss any differences or suggested corrections.

7. Three copies of the translation, when printed, are to be forwarded to the author of this book.

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